c. [Nov.? 1998]

THE WEEKLY UPDATE

avant garde style

by Lydia Linker & Lee Montgomery **Vol 2, Issue 4**

There has been quite a hub-bub this week around the issue of faculty and their "reNEWal." This seems a prime time to address the issue especially since we have received mail from "concerned students" on this very topic. Before we begin, we would like to reiterate our joy and appreciation at receiving mail and the continued conversation that has been inspired through this venue, however there are some logistical "rules" that we as "reporters" need submitters to follow. We cannot print nor address issues brought up by anonymous people. If you would like to remain anonymous to the public, you can make that request, however we can't print information when we don't know what our source is. Also, if you want us to address an issue, please put it in writing as the few, wonderful submitters have done. Lydia and Lee both have lives outside of the Weekly Update and nary the twain shall meet. On that note...

THE GEARS ON THE FACULTY "reNEWal" MACHINE ARE TURNING

As many of us have heard through the rumor mill, many permanent faculty members who have given the better part of their lives to the San Francisco Art Institute have either been asked to leave, or have been given sub-par retirement packages and, as a result, need to find better employment elsewhere. This can be an alarming change if you don't know where it's coming from. Here is my de-mystification of the process. You can make your own judgements.

It all starts with the birth of "permanent faculty" versus the traditional "tenured faculty" status. Somewhere between 5 and 10 years ago (not very long in the grand scheme of things), a change from the 'old-school' hierarchy with the institution of "tenured faculty" at the Art Institute took a progressive direction in keeping the faculty who would otherwise be considered tenured as "permanent faculty." I believe at the time most of the faculty considered the label, "permanent," as a different appellation to the same idea of "tenured." However, today as we see the repercussions of this decision, I think "tentative" suits the situation more than "tenured." Kathy Acker's less than satisfied position while she was here at the Art Institute comes to mind.

This brand new "permanent faculty" didn't have any parameters until recently. There was no retirement plan up until now. Having sat on the faculty senate last year, I saw the run-around that the faculty were being given in regards to their retirement plan. The high turnover in the Human Resources department was part of this delay. However, the task of creating a retirement plan within the institute's budget that equalizes all permanent faculty regardless of how long they've been teaching here is not the most desired job. So, when we talk about the terrible retirement plan, it's not necessarily the plan that's bad, but more of the situation that the plan has been implemented in.

Finally, let's look at what happens when faculty leave the Art Institute for a better life elsewhere. Not only do they get to move on to something more interesting and exciting than this place, but we, the constantly changing student body, supposedly get access to more hot artists. The ultimate idea behind faculty "reNEWal" is that the students will have the opportunity to form relationships with a wide variety of the current "best" artists.

I hope we all see this version of the future of SFAI where faculty leaves because they want to move on and more, exciting artists come to teach. As much as I hate to see my favorite, well established faculty members go (what would my experience here be without them?), I would like to see more Karen Finley types opening doors for the future SFAI student. Now, with this "permanent faculty" issue in mind, my question is: What happens with the "visiting" faculty? What about the "adjunct" faculty? If we are "letting go" of permanent faculty due to lack of funds, do we give these patient, undefined members of our faculty the financial compensation they deserve? Where is our almost $20,000 a year tuition going anyway?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Kudos to Bill Berkson who is the Weekly Update's first and only non-anonymous letter writer. We appreciate his proper use of this venue as a mode of dialogue and we hope that more of you will follow Bill's lead and take risks as we are taught to do here at the Art Institute. Without further adieu, Bill Berkson:

"About your latest 'update' re the Associate Dean position: I respect your and Lee's vigilance but wish you would take the time to ask the parties most directly involved to set you straight regarding the facts. Not only am I taking a sabbatical this semester but I made it clear to Larry Thomas around this time last year that, after the end of the 1997-98 academic year, I no longer wished to continue in any administrative capacity; therefore it would have been pointless for anyone to, as you suggest, offer me the job of Associate Dean.

As for Reagan Louie, I believe he made a similar decision, but you should ask him about that. (It's my recollection that Larry asked Reagan if he would be interested in the Associate Dean position and that Reagan responded in the negative.)

I take issue with a lot else of what you have to say on the topic but leave it to others -- Larry, Catherine, Reagan -- to do what would otherwise eat up too much of my time.

Time really is an issue here. You have a bad habit of sending out alarms without having thoroughly researched the areas you're alarmed about. This wastes time."

Thank you, Bill, for taking the time to respond to us. And now, using this same venue, here is my open response to Bill:

Thank you, Bill, for setting us straight on the facts regarding who has been asked to fill in the position of Associate Dean. As I said in my report, I had only heard of one reason why persons of faculty status were not encouraged to take administrative positions. Considering the weekly turnover at the Art Institute, I don't blame you for not wanting the position. However, the point of the article was not about you or Reagan or even Larry. As the good artist I am learning to become here, I am pointing out what I see. I see many misconceptions of what the Art Institute is and I am afraid of what it is becoming due to the lack of people in charge of organization and direction. As a student, I am directly affected by our lack of an Undergraduate Program Director or Associate Dean or Faculty Chairs for that matter

I take issue with a lot of what goes on here and, yes, I'm alarmed because these issues are alarming to me and my tuition dollar which is exactly the reason that I choose to take time out of my week to work on this paper. As this is a "weekly" paper, there is only so much time in that week with which to do research. This is why I usually ask questions, in the hopes that someone like you, Bill, will answer them. In fact, I look forward to letters of clarification from all factions of the Institute. So, Bill, if you want to talk about wasting time, let's talk about wasting our tuition money because, as we all know, time is money.

Sincerely,
Lydia Linker
Co-editor in chief

AS USUAL, SUBMIT!:

THE PHILISTINE (in the mail room)

LYDIA LINKER (BFA)

R. LEE MONTGOMERY (MFA)